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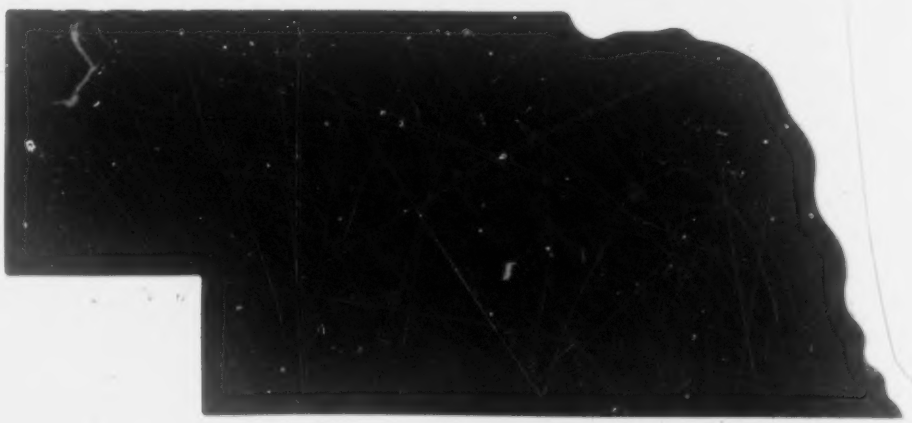

NEBRASKA ANNUAL SOCIAL INDICATORS SURVEY

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NASIS-82, #10

NEBRASKANS' VIEWS ON PUBLIC WELFARE ISSUES

Carol Moats Tomer

and

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Nebraska Department of Public Welfare

Price: $ .75

The Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey

Helen A. Moore - 1982 Study Director

The findings in this report are based on data collected in the sixth Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey (NASIS). This survey is part of an on-going study of the quality of life in Nebraska conducted by the Bureau of Sociological Research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

The sample for NASIS consists of 1907 respondents eighteen years of age or older residing in households in Nebraska. The sample is selected through a process called random digit dialing: within each three-digit prefix in the state, four-digit numbers are selected randomly from all possible four-digit numbers to complete the telephone number. Respondents are further chosen randomly from the adults in the household and interviewed by telephone by experienced, professional interviewers from the offices of the Bureau of Sociological Research. All interviewing was done between February and April of 1982. This procedure produces a high-quality, representative sample of Nebraska adults. Analysis shows the sample to be representative of the state on age, sex, race, and geographical distribution.

The interview averaged approximately 47 minutes and included questions about energy use, health, recreation, political attitudes, occupation, education, family life, and other matters reflecting the quality of life experienced in the state. For the entire sample, the chances are 95 in 100 that the true value for the population lies within a range equal to the reported survey percentage plus or minus 2.24 percent. This is an estimate of maximum error and for most items the percentages are likely to be even more accurate.

The data gathered by NASIS are used by a wide variety of State and local government agencies for policy and program planning and by faculty and students at the University of Nebraska and other colleges for research. No information identifying any respondent is released to any user and the strict confidentiality of individual respondents is rigidly enforced. While the final responsibility for the organization and structure of the survey and for reports produced under its name rests with the Bureau of Sociological Research, public agencies and University departments play an integral part in planning the survey through an Advisory Committee. Public organizations interested in membership on the Advisory Committee should contact the NASIS Study Director.

Funding for NASIS comes from the University of Nebraska, the Bureau of Sociological Research and State and local agencies which buy items and data analysis from the survey.

The NASIS surveys are repeated each year to measure changes in the quality of life in Nebraska. While there is a core of questions which is included every year, each survey has a large component of unique items which address specific topical issues. Plans for future years include reinterviewing the 1977 panel every two years to assess changes in their lives. Additional detail on the NASIS surveys regarding use of the survey data or cost of purchasing items on future surveys can be obtained by contacting the NASIS Study Director at the Bureau of Sociological Research or by sending for a copy of the 1983 NASIS Prospectus.

During the Reagan Administration, significant changes have occurred in funding levels and administrative structures of the nation's public welfare programs. Not only have federal allocations for most social welfare programs been substantially reduced and/or consolidated in lump sum block grants to states, but some decisions formerly made at the federal level are now the sole responsibility of individual states.

Federal lawmakers continue to make certain assumptions about society and welfare and the "truly needy" in contrast to individuals whose needs do not require public (i.e., government) assistance. In an effort to develop an information base to respond to new federal mandates based on these assumptions, the Nebraska Department of Public Welfare (NDPW) participated in NASIS-82. Information was gathered from responses to a number of questions regarding public welfare issues.

Public administrators wrestling with regulatory reform are trying to continue meeting human service needs in Nebraska with ever decreasing dollars and federal support. While local sentiment runs high for local control of programs supported by tax dollars, most communities are not in a position to pay for programs federally inspired and now turned back to the states with decreased federal financial participation. A basic question which comes to mind is: Where will the resources come from to meet existing needs, or possibly increasing needs?

One of the federal assumptions relating to this question is that the private sector can and will contribute greatly to alleviating human suffering, as the public role diminishes. NDPW decided to question NASIS participants as to what percentage of funding for programs for the needy should come from the private sector.

Out of 957 respondents, 556 stated a specific percentage of funding should come from the private sector for programs for the needy. The findings below categorize cumulatively how the 556 persons responded:

PERCENT FUNDING WHICH SHOULD COME FROM PRIVATE SECTOR	CUMULATIVE PERCENT RESPONDENTS	NUMBER
10% or Less	39%	216
25% or Less	65%	148
50% or Less	95%	162

Thirty-five percent of those persons endorsing "50% or less private sector funding for programs for the needy" at the same time responded that Nebraska's government should spend more money on the poor.

To serve the poor in Nebraska, resources must come from the private sector, public sector, or both. New attempts might be made to tap private sector resources, and lobbying for increased financial support of programs for the needy might become a more intensive, on-going process in which the State Legislature is the focal point. Another alternative gaining momentum is the exploration of public/private partnerships.

Of those NASIS respondents who felt the private sector should contribute at least some funding to programs for the needy, 65% thought the private sector should only contribute 25% or less. This (coupled with the earlier findings supporting increased Nebraska government spending on the poor, but low private sector involvement) clearly indicates that public opinion in Nebraska favors continued and substantial government support as opposed to private sector contributions to serving the needy.

Governmental Decision Making

Turning to another issue, NASIS respondents were asked about governmental decision-making. With increasing momentum over the last two decades,

the federal government exercised extensive involvement and control over programs for the needy. State and local planners and policy makers worked within federal regulations to administer and supervise such programs; but perhaps the decisions of greatest programmatic impact were made primarily at the federal level.

The federal government, though, has acted upon a recent wave of sentiment toward decentralization of government by giving states some flexibility to choose where various kinds of decisions are best made. In turn, NASIS respondents expressed their views on who should have control over a number of activities in relation to programs for the needy.

When asked who should budget welfare dollars among the needy--Federal Government? State Government? Local Government? -- over half of the NASIS respondents in each case indicated the federal, state and local governments should not be involved. This could reflect the public's desire for more personal control over the spending of welfare dollars for the needy. Nebraska citizens, however, seem to lean more toward state and local government control than federal government control of programs for the needy.

Of those persons indicating a preference for government involvement, more respondents favored state and local governments over the federal government. Responses were split as follows:

Who should budget welfare dollars among the needy?

	YES	NO
Federal Government?	20.9%	79.1%
State Government?	46.0%	54.0%
Local Government?	46.7%	53.3%

Respondents' opinions on other activities in relation to programs for the needy were as follows:

QUESTION

A. Who should make decisions about what groups will receive assistance or services?

	YES	NO
Federal Government?	21.7%	78.3%
State Government?	43.4%	56.6%
Local Government?	50.8%	49.2%

B. Who should establish policies that regulate how programs operate?

	YES	NO
Federal Government?	24.7%	75.3%
State Government?	54.8%	45.2%
Local Government?	32.1%	67.9%

C. Who should develop and plan programs for the needy?

	YES	NO
Federal Government?	21.7%	78.3%
State Government	49.0%	51.0%
Local Government?	45.2%	54.8%

D. Who should monitor programs that deliver services to the needy?

	YES	NO
Federal Government?	15.6%	84.4%
State Government?	40.3%	59.7%
Local Government?	54.3%	45.7%

The responses clearly show a tendency toward greater public confidence in state and local governments versus the federal government to make decisions about programs for the needy. Respondents for the most

part favored state or local governments performing activities related to programs for the needy.

This information seems to suggest that the public now views state and local governments as they once may have viewed the federal government in conjunction with state governments -- that is, as the policy making and program planning and development authorities. At the same time, people favor local control over program monitoring. The assumption most likely made is that people at the local level are in the best position to monitor service delivery in terms of greater knowledge of local circumstances.

Funding Services

NASIS participants were asked if they preferred raising taxes or reducing state services and programs in order to have enough tax money to pay for the various services and programs that the state government provides. Responses to other NASIS questions (see page 7) indicate that the majority of respondents favored continuation of every service/assistance program about which they were questioned. However, most respondents, when requested to choose between the two, favored reducing services over raising taxes. Of 823 respondents, 27.7% answered that they preferred raising taxes, while 64.8% favored reducing services, and 7.5% of the responses were classified "Other."

Some significant differences are apparent among those Nebraskans who said they would prefer raising taxes over reducing services. Recalling the previous table showing how NASIS respondents felt about which government level should have control over activities in relation to programs for the needy, a further breakdown of responses indicates the following:

--Individuals who preferred raising taxes to support state programs and services were not as strongly opposed to federal decision-making about who should get services as persons who preferred reducing services and programs.

--Individuals who supported raising taxes vs. reducing services would allow more policy-making at the federal level, regulating how programs for the needy operate, than those who supported reducing services.

These findings are very compatible with the earlier results supporting state and local level control over decisions most directly affecting clients served. If services are going to be reduced, people have indicated that they would prefer to keep decisions about how to reduce services closer to the people affected. On the other hand, people seem to feel that when taxes are raised, the Federal government should be involved (perhaps because tax increases are frequently associated more with the Federal government than state and local governments).

Facing declining tax dollars for welfare services, human services administrators and state legislators have looked critically at current assistance programs, questioning:

1. Can program funding be reduced in some specific areas without hurting needy clients?
2. Can some services be eliminated altogether?
3. Should funding cuts occur only in some service/assistance areas, or cross-the-board in all areas?

With these questions in the minds of, and voiced by decision-makers, media accounts and other information campaigns have reached the general public who in turn have pondered the questions and formulated opinions. NASIS participants were given the opportunity to state whether or not they favored continuing any of a list of specific service/assistance programs in light of ever-decreasing tax dollars for welfare. Responses were as follows:

Service/Assistance Program	Number of Respondents to Question	Percent of Respondents Favoring Continuation
Social Services for Abused or Neglected Children	942	98.6%
Services for Disabled Children or Adults	936	97.5%
Community Programs for the Mentally Retarded	930	92.9%
Payments for Medical Care for Low Income People	901	84.6%
Spouse Abuse Programs	905	74.0%
In-Home Services for the Elderly such as Homemaker and Yard Care	918	65.3%
Meal Services for the Elderly of all Income Levels	930	61.3%
Living Expenses for Low Income Families	872	60.0%

Clearly, well over half of the respondents in each case felt that all the services should continue. While support was highest for continuing social services for abused or neglected children, support was lowest for continuing to pay living expenses for low income families. One reason for the latter could be a common belief that people can and should work to support their families. However, at 60%, support is still strong for continued payment of living expenses.

As mentioned previously, the greatest public support (i.e., 98.6%) was indicated for continuation of social services for abused or neglected children. Protective services for children - including recognition of needs, problems, and resources available to meet the needs - have been widely publicized for the past several years, probably receiving more public attention than any other social service. It, therefore, stands to reason that public support is high. Another likely reason for strong support of child protective services (CPS) is the local nature of the issues involved. Extensive community involvement characterizes CPS as local citizens have

historically been willing to volunteer their resources to tackle the problem of child neglect, abuse, and exploitation.

Whereas children tend to be viewed (very emotionally) as helpless victims of whatever comes their way, the elderly are often thought not to be so vulnerable (i.e., only 65.3% of NASIS respondents favored continuation of in-home services for the elderly - although 65.3% is clearly a majority, it is significantly lower than the 98.6% support figure for CPS). With the elderly population increasing dramatically, in-home services which are generally provided at a lower cost than institutional care will be especially important in the years ahead. Perhaps a lesson to be learned from the success of child protective services is that by publicly focusing on needs, as well as resources available for a specific population in need, and investing local resources, public support may be secured over time for other needed social services.

Overall findings from the NASIS survey demonstrate that persons in less favorable economic circumstances (i.e., the unemployed and retired) tend to be more supportive of social services than those with steady employment. Below are some of the findings in this regard:

--87% of the NASIS respondents who were unemployed or looking for work (27 of 31 respondents) felt in-home services for the elderly should continue, while only 65.3% (599 of 917) of the total sample were in favor of continuation.

--While 84.6% (762 of 901) of all NASIS respondents said medical payments for poor families should contiue, 91.9% (102 of 111) of retired NASIS respondents favored continuation.

--60% (523 of 872) of the total NASIS sample said living expenses for poor families should continue to be paid, but 76.6% (82 of 107) of retired respondents felt the same. Full-time workers (44.6% against) (191 of 428) were the group most opposed to continuing payment of living expenses for poor families.

Discussion

The findings noted in this report have important implications for Nebraskans concerned about public assistance and programs and services for the needy. Not only are the findings pertinent to the policy making and planning efforts of public administrators, but individuals or groups attempting to gain public recognition and support can benefit from some of the findings relating to specific services currently favored for continuation.

List of reports already released using data gathered in the 1982 Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey. These may be purchased at the indicated price from the Bureau of Sociological Research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Report Number	Title
1.	Designs, Procedures, Instruments and Forms for the 1982 NASIS. Helen A. Moore. Price: $7.50.
2.	Attitudes Toward Social Security. Warren Luckner. Price: $1.25.
3.	Community Colleges and Higher Education. Helen A. Moore. Price: $1.00.
4.	The Status of Older Nebraskans. Jane C. Ollenburger and the Bureau of Sociological Research. Price: $1.50.
5.	Social Responses to Scarcity. Alan Booth. Price: $1.00.
6.	A Look at Nebraskan's Favorite Outdoor Recreational Activities. David R. Johnson and Laurie K. Scheuble.
7.	Social Security and Government Spending: The Elderly Speak Out. Jane C. Ollenburger and the Bureau of Sociological Research. Price: $ .75.
8.	Support for Programs Related to Alcohol Problems. Helen A. Moore. Price: $ .75.
9.	Nebraskans and Health Risks: Social Indicators of Health Status. Stephanie L. Shanks and Richard L. Meile. Price: $ .75.